

Come Together

November 01, 1999

I thought I would write about psychology from the point of view of a provost, since I am in the strange position of being both president of APS and a provost at the same time. I was recently asked by the faculty of my department what I thought of psychology on the campus as a provost, and I told them it wasn't on my screen. This took them aback, but it is true, and probably true for most provosts, but why?

Although there are many psychologists on this campus, they are spread among different departments and different colleges. We have two psychology departments here at University of Florida — the Department of Clinical and Health Psychology in the College of Health Professions in the Health Science Center, and the Department of Psychology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This is not uncommon across the country — psychology departments can often be split into two departments over personality disputes, or perhaps known as departments that don't get along. This phenomenon diffuses the influence of psychology.

Other fields hang together as disciplines. But not psychologists. We split or fight with each other and become ineffective — a self-defeating exercise. Psychologists could be a very large and influential group, but they are not. The total number of psychologists on this campus exceeds the total number of faculty in the smaller colleges but instead of coming together as a force to be reckoned with, they form smaller groups at various colleges on campus.

As a unified entity, psychologists would make significant progress in a number of areas. For example, in my university, psychologists could have a major influence through undergraduate teaching. Psychology is one of the most popular majors — if not the most popular major — at most universities. Psychology courses are very popular and the introductory psychology course is a top course at universities. This gives psychology a tremendous edge over other disciplines, which are not such an important part of the instructional mission. Psychology departments should do a wonderful job in teaching their courses: they should emphasize their importance to the teaching mission; they should be willing to teach as many students who are willing to take their courses; and they should widely and loudly publicize the importance they have in teaching. Other departments such as English and mathematics have done this for a long time, and, because they have more successfully sold the importance of their service teaching, they are larger in general than psychology departments.

As a unified discipline, psychologists could be more successful in arguing for increased funding. That funding could enhance their teaching and thereby their research. They can argue for computers for multimedia instruction. They can argue for labs in which to teach, offices in which to meet students, and more faculty to handle the load.

Psychologists in various departments and colleges on campuses should group together and have an identity as psychologists. They should minimize their internal differences on campus. No one outside of psychology cares about the subtle differences between fields of cognitive psychology or animal learning

or humanistic vs. other approaches. In fracturing the discipline among subgroups, we make ourselves less effective. We don't hear the physicists, or chemists, or historians arguing among themselves, splitting into subgroups, and dividing their departments in half. We have more in common with each other than we do with other disciplines. If we looked outward rather than inward we would be much more successful.